

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Representative Xavier Becerra (CA-31) submitted into the Congressional Record today an extension of remarks recognizing and honoring the 12th inter-Korean family reunion that began this past Saturday, November 5, 2005 and will last through today, November 10, 2005. Over the course of the six days, a total of 909 North and South Koreans (including a handful of Korean Americans) will feel the warm embrace of their separated family members for the first time in over 50 years.

Below are Rep. Becerra's remarks as they were submitted into the Congressional Record:

RECOGNIZING THE 12TH ROUND OF INTER-KOREAN FAMILY REUNIONS

NOVEMBER 5 - 10, 2005

HON. XAVIER BECERRA

In The House of Representatives

Thursday, November 10, 2005

Mr. Speaker, since the landmark Joint Declaration was signed during the inter-Korean summit that took place on June 15, 2000, 11 rounds of family reunions between South and North Korea have taken place. Over these five years, more than 10,000 people have been given the chance to do something they have not done in over 50 years – and that is to once again feel the warm embrace of their family. This past Saturday, November 5, 2005, a 12th reunion began at North Korea's Mount Kumgang Resort and will last through today, November 10, 2005.

And so Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize this historic event, as these incredibly emotional and heart-warming reunions underscore the unimaginable pain experienced by families forced apart in 1950 at the outbreak of the Korean War. A renewed sense of urgency surrounds these reunions as divided family members are well into their senior years; many of whom have already passed away and were never afforded the opportunity to do that which so many of us are blessed to do daily: converse face to face with a daughter or brother or mother or father.

Great strides have been taken to expand the breadth and depth of these reunifications to allow for greater participation. In addition to the face to face meetings, South Korea has incorporated live television and video feeds for those family members who cannot make the trip to Mount Kumgang. South Korea has also committed to hold family reunions on a regular basis and institutionalize both the exchange of letters and the process of confirming the fates and whereabouts of separated family members. Already, the status of some 20,000 individuals – living and deceased – have been confirmed. Furthermore, South Korea is currently constructing a family reunion center that will serve as the permanent location for hosting future reunions.

A seldom-cited fact is that there are more than 10 million separated family members – a staggering one quarter of the nation's population – currently in South Korea. In addition, there

are more than 500,000 Korean Americans here in our own country who also share the pain of having separated family members in North Korea.

The South Korean government has held talks with North Korea on the topic of including Koreans from all over the world in the reunification efforts. As a result of the second and third round of ministerial meetings that were held in 2000 between the two Koreas, 115 Koreans living overseas, including 84 Korean Americans, have been afforded the opportunity to see and be with their separated family members.

The South Korean government has stated that it will make all efforts possible to continue to create greater opportunities for Koreans living abroad to meet their divided family members. So far, about 1,000 Koreans living overseas have applied to participate in the reunions, 600 of whom live right here in the United States.

For these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I wish to recognize and pay tribute to the 12th round of inter-Korean family reunions. Perhaps it is also fitting for all of us here in this body to take a moment to reflect on the importance of family, recognizing that the time we spend with them is so precious and must never be taken for granted. I also wish to express my personal appreciation and commend the government and people of South Korea for all they have done to institutionalize these important reunions and encourage them to continue their full commitment to family reunification.

Rep. Becerra currently serves as the vice-chair of U.S.-Republic of Korea Interparliamentary Exchange, an Executive Board member of Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) and is an active member of the Congressional Korea Caucus. He is the author of H.Con.Res.77, "Expressing the sense of the Congress regarding the efforts of people of the United States of Korean ancestry to reunite with their family members in North Korea" and has been a strong advocate for family reunification, which during the 107th Congress passed by a vote of 420-0 on November 28, 2001.

Becerra.house.gov